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STATE FOR WHA/CAR (RBUDDEN)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#) [ENRG](#) [KCOR](#) [JM](#) [XL](#)
SUBJECT: JAMAICA: ELECTION VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL PARTY
LEADERSHIP: WHO REALLY MADE A MISTAKE?

REF: A. KINGSTON 635
[1](#)B. 06 KINGSTON 2021

Classified By: Charge Edward Wehrli for Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a recent meeting with the Commissioner of Elections Danville Walker, the Commissioner noted that he believes the risk of political violence during elections is low. He also revealed his belief that Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller (PSM) did not call elections earlier in order to heal rifts within the People's National Party (PNP) following a contentious party convention that resulted in her elevation to party leadership. Finally, he reported his belief that elections were originally scheduled for November 2006, but were canceled when Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) leader Bruce Golding revealed details of the Trafigura scandal. That revelation, Walker believes, may have eroded the JLP's opportunity to regain power. End Summary.

Political Violence - Another Perspective

[1](#)2. (C) There has been much speculation in the media and among political observers that election violence will erupt this year. Surprisingly, Walker discounts this possibility. While he acknowledges that the division in constituencies between the JLP and PNP "...is the closest (it's been) in history," he believes that Jamaican culture - and political parties - have fundamentally changed since the "bad old days."

[1](#)3. (C) Walker noted that political parties used to be arms of unions dating back to the 1940s (pre-independence). According to Walker, unions were the bases for political parties and political parties evolved to function as arms of unions. Today, none of the leadership in either party has any attachment to a union. In fact, the last leader with a direct union connection was P. J. Patterson - and he served as a union lawyer. Walker noted that when Patterson retired from the PNP in the spring of 2006, most of the old party stalwarts from the same period retired with him. While unions have engaged in violence in the past for political parties, Walker observed that unions gained nothing from it and have largely abandoned violent protests.

[1](#)4. (C) Walker does acknowledge that the "dons" had replaced the unions in political party affiliation beginning in the 1970s; however, he noted that today the "dons" are solely interested in profit. They will help get the vote out for their party, but he also wisely observed that the dons don't need politicians anymore. In fact, he said that the result of violence is a loss of profit for the dons, as shops and businesses all over the island will close in response. Consequently, they will be unable to collect their protection money. Most importantly, Walker believes that politicians no longer have "the stomach" for violence and that they learned

an important lesson from inciting their supporters in the past: they (politicians) can't control the outcome.

15. (C) Walker points to the rise of the dons in the political party system and their subsequent solidification of their criminal enterprises outside political party control as prime evidence used by party leadership to stay as far removed from violence as possible. Walker believes that today's political parties are well-aware of the "Frankenstein" yesterday's leaders created and are desperate to try and separate themselves from that monster. When asked about recent police action in Tivoli Gardens, Walker noted that in the days of Edward Seaga (former JLP leader), Seaga would have marched into Tivoli Gardens and "bunkered down" with his constituents for three or four days while encouraging the shoot-out to continue, stating that "Eddy (Seaga) didn't take any shit from anybody." Today, JLP leader Bruce Golding respectfully requested an inquiry into police action.

16. (C) Tivoli Gardens, while always viewed as a bellwether for political violence may, according to Walker, be misleading. The police are strongly believed to support the PNP while Tivoli Gardens is a JLP stronghold and the constituency represented by Golding. Despite Tivoli Gardens' long history of violence, Walker contends that any action is in all likelihood a wash for both political parties. While the JLP points to police action as an example of government abuse of power, PNP supporters look at violence and remember the days of Seaga - when he "bunkered down" with the armed thugs - as an example of JLP abuses and a reminder of the rise of extra-judicial killings under Seaga when he was Prime Minister.

17. (C) Walker pointed out that most of the violence today is a result of intra-party fighting - PNP vs PNP and JLP vs JLP armed thugs warring within their own party-controlled constituencies. The fighting, he argues, is not about party control, ideology, or anything similar, it is simply about divvying up profits.

18. (C) Finally, Walker argues that despite public belief that the police are aligned with the PNP, he firmly believes that the police are trying to do as good a job as possible. More importantly, they want to change public perception. He acknowledges that police are political, but also observes that the Police Commissioner has been very responsive to concerns about individual police officers. Walker reported that the Commissioner has put police officers on leave or transferred them to other constituencies if he believed they were becoming too involved in local politics.

Why Weren't There Early Elections? PSM Would Have Lost

19. (C) One of the biggest mysteries since PSM's elevation to Prime Minister is why she didn't call elections shortly after her elevation to Prime Minister when her poll numbers were high. Walker emphatically argued that PSM didn't call elections because she would have lost. He noted, "Popularity doesn't translate into victory in Jamaica." PSM, he argued, had put "internal" PNP machinery in place to win the leadership of the party, but that internal machinery is not designed to win national campaigns. Walker pointed out that the internal party fight for control was contentious, and PSM had to do "serious work" to win over rank-and-file supporters of now Minister of National Security Peter Phillips as well as the other contenders for leadership. "In Jamaica, media campaigns don't work. The voter must see, hear, and touch the candidate." PSM needed time to travel to the island to meet PNP supporters and heal the wounds of the internal party fight if she wanted to win a national campaign. Island-wide traveling to "meet and greet" PNP members is not inexpensive and all the PNP "moneymen" retired along with P. J. Patterson leaving PSM "cash poor."

The PNP Scandal That May Cost the JLP Election Victory

¶10. (C) Walker revealed that he believed elections were originally scheduled for November 2006. In August 2006, the Prime Minister's Office contacted him to ask about the amount of time the Electoral Office would need to prepare for elections. "When I told them we needed 90 days to 'ramp-up' the Prime Minister was very upset." (NOTE: As reported ref A, 18,900 people must be hired and trained for a Jamaican election. END NOTE). Nonetheless, the Commission began hiring and training people for an election Walker believed would occur in early November. Then, the Trafigura scandal was revealed by Golding (ref B). Unfortunately for Golding and the JLP, he revealed it prior to elections being called. Walker firmly believes that Trafigura derailed the November election and that had Golding waited, it "would have blown PNP out of the water." He said there was a clear pattern among PNP supporters following the revelation: denial, disbelief, and, finally, outrage. He stated that if Golding had timed the revelation, the outrage would have hit as voters were going to the polls.

COMMENT:

¶11. (C) Danville Walker was educated as an accountant in the United States and worked for several years as a CPA. While there, he married and had two children. In the early 1990s, he returned to Jamaica to give his children "the wonderful childhood I had growing up in Jamaica." He reported to poloff that he has developed deep concerns about the future of Jamaica in the last several years. "If my children had asked to move back to the United States in the mid-1990s, I would have done everything I could to persuade them otherwise. Now, I think I would help them." He spoke freely about the crumbling infrastructure, the poor quality of schools for children of the working poor, and the rise of crime and corruption. He also took politicians from both political parties to task for doing nothing more than "sitting in the same chairs of their Colonial masters." He hopes that this election will mark the beginning of a change for Jamaica: towards better governance. His lack of a clear political allegiance makes his comments more credible. On the one hand, he discussed Seaga's abuse of power, while on the other hand stating that "If Portia loses the election, perhaps Jamaica will finally rid itself of 'messianic' leaders."

¶12. (C) Walker did report that the Election Office is ready to go whenever elections are finally called. Due to the fact that they hired all needed employees in the Fall of 2006 in anticipation of a November election, all workers have been trained. The minimum amount of time between announcing an election and actually voting is 16 days (ref A). If Walker's assessment of PNP reaction is correct, PSM may very well call an election as soon possible: in case Golding does have another scandal to reveal, a quick election would likely catch PNP supporters in the "disbelief" stage of reaction. What is certain is that Golding is not going to make the same mistake again. He has remained tight-lipped about any other scandal and will surely not reveal anything until after an election date is set.

Wehrli